

Q &A's - Bulk Water Transfer Windamere to Burrendong Dam

Is WaterNSW going to transfer water from Windamere to Burrendong Dam?

- If the current dry weather conditions persist, WaterNSW will undertake a bulk water transfer (BWT) from Windamere Dam to Burrendong Dam.

When is the bulk water transfer likely to happen?

- Should the ongoing dry conditions and record lack of inflows into Burrendong Dam continue the transfer will start in January 2019.

Why is WaterNSW planning this transfer?

- Windamere Dam provides a secure water supply for the Cudgegong Valley, and the dam and its catchment are also large enough to secure some water for customers in the Macquarie valley.
- Below average rainfall and extremely low inflows has lowered dam levels across many regions of NSW, with Burrendong sitting at 17.6% of capacity and Windamere 38.8% (3 Dec 2018).
- Under the conditions of the Macquarie-Cudgegong Water Sharing Plan (WSP), transfers of some water from Windamere to Burrendong occur when Burrendong's storage levels drop, to ensure reliability of supply to all customers.
- The Macquarie-Cudgegong WSP provides for water trading between the systems. Since 1997-98 on average about 6,600 ML has been net traded down from Cudgegong to Macquarie River. A total of 17,400 ML was net traded down from the Cudgegong in 2017-18. Until now most of this traded water from Cudgegong has been delivered in the Macquarie with the water sourced from inflows into Burrendong Dam. In an extended drought such as this, bulk water transfers may be required to meet the delivery requirements.

How much water is being transferred?

- The transfer will take place in two distinct stages. The first phase of the transfer would be in January/February 2019 comprised of 35 gigalitres. A second phase of the transfer will occur in spring 2019.
- Under the terms of the Macquarie-Cudgegong WSP and the Bulk Water Transfer (BWT) protocol, WaterNSW is obligated to ensure that at least 70,000 megalitres of water is left in Windamere Dam at the completion of the transfer.
- This volume of water will provide a minimum of seven years of water security to local customers.
- WaterNSW is working with the new Cudgegong Valley Water Security Committee to clarify the details of the transfer.

How does WaterNSW engage the Cudgegong Community in the planning of any BWT?

- The 2004 WSP required the development of a BWT protocol in consultation with the Cudgegong community. The protocol was developed in consultation with the Cudgegong Valley Water Committee and the transfer was carried out in winter 2004 under the conditions of the protocol.
- A review of the BWT protocol was started in 2011. The revised protocol was completed and endorsed by the Department of Industry Water (DOI Water) in 2015. One of the key requirements of the BWT protocol is for WaterNSW to consult the Cudgegong Valley Water Committee on operationalising any BWT.
- WaterNSW is talking to customers and other water users including the newly formed Cudgegong Valley Water Security Committee and Midwest Regional Council about the timing of the transfer and what safeguards are in place to ensure water security for Windamere users.
- WaterNSW will also hold a public information session about the transfer and to seek feedback on communication preferences.

When was the last transfer?

- The last transfer between the two storages occurred in winter 2004. A total of about 70,000 ML had been planned to be transferred but the transfer was ceased after 14,000 ML due to rain and inflows into Burrendong Dam.

What happens if it rains before or during the transfer?

- If there are substantial inflows into Burrendong Dam there is every likelihood that the transfer date may be revised.

If we do not like the rules in the WSP what is the process for changing the rules?

- Under the Murray-Darling Basin Plan 2012 (the Basin Plan), Basin states must prepare and submit Water Resource Plans for assessment by the Commonwealth government.
- These Water Resource Plans each cover a specified area and may include a water sharing plan that describes how water will be managed and shared within that area.
- Stakeholder Advisory Panels (SAPs) have been set up for each water resource plan area. The Cudgegong Valley is represented in the SAP for Macquarie-Castlereagh Surface Water Resource Plan by Brad Cam and Bev Smiles.

How do we provide input into WaterNSW's asset management and water delivery operations in the Macquarie and Cudgegong rivers?

- WaterNSW has established area-based Customer Advisory Groups (CAG, formally CSC) across rural and metro NSW as the primary forum to regularly consult with a broad cross-section of customers on an area basis.
- Brad Cam from Mid-Western Regional Council currently represents the Cudgegong Valley on the Macquarie-Cudgegong CAG. Ideas for improving asset management and water delivery operations in the valley can be discussed with Mr Cam.
- Consultation covers issues relevant to the performance of WaterNSW's obligations to customers under the WaterNSW Operating Licence or WaterNSW Customer Service Charter.
- The current CAG's term of office is from 1 July 2017 to 30 June 2019.
- CAG membership includes WaterNSW customers from the regulated and unregulated streams, groundwater irrigators, stock and domestic water users, major water utilities, local water utilities, local government, environmental water users and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage water users.

How do I get information on river heights and volumes during the transfer?

- WaterNSW will publish the past seven days of actual flows and next seven days of predicted flows and river heights weekly in the Mudgee Guardian. In addition, this information will also be published on the Mid-Western Regional Council's website.

- Information on river heights is also available through the WaterNSW website www.realtimedata.watersw.com.au.
- Periodic notifications will be made through WaterNSW's Early Warning Network (EWN) platform. To register for this service please phone 1300 662 077 or visit www.watersw.com.au/supply/ewn.
- Important changes to the BWT will also be communicated via the local media: Mudgee Guardian and radio 2MG.
- River heights and storage levels can be accessed through the Smartphone App – Water Live.

Will my allocations for 2019-20 be affected by the proposed transfer?

- Allocations are determined by the Department of Industry Water (DOI Water) and allocations for 2019-20 will likely be announced on 1 July 2019.
- However, the BWT protocol endorsed in 2015 ensures sufficient reserves are set aside in Windamere Dam to provide Cudgegong regulated river requirements through the drought of record equivalent prior to the commencement of the 2004 WSP.
- These requirements include maximum likely usage in the Cudgegong valley of approximately 10,000 ML per annum. Total water use in 2017-18 was about 7,000 ML.
- General security customers can carryover their remaining account water into future years.

How is the flow regime for the transfer planned?

- Flow peaks and recessions are based on natural flow patterns prior to the construction of Windamere Dam.
- Flow peaks have been designed in line with Environmental Watering Requirements to stimulate movement and spawning in some native fish species. The large pulse flows are also important for natural river processes and increasing productivity. Higher flows also have the potential to provide fish passage past a number of barriers.
- Low flows have been scheduled consistent with feedback from the community. Low flow periods will allow for movement of stock across the river and any planned community recreational water activities.
- Flows have been capped at 1,500 ML/day at the dam.
- The multi-level off-take at Windamere Dam will be used when possible to reduce cold water pollution downstream.

Will the planned flows affect my ability to extract water from the river? Will I have to move pumps?

- Peak flow and duration is determined with the intention that there is minimal interruption to water extractions.
- Early warnings will be issued concerning significant dam releases and predicted river heights.
- Advice will be issued to avoid pumping during the first flush to avoid debris clogging the pump operation, along with regular media updates on river heights.

Will the transfer affect the recreational activities on the lake from the Cudgegong Waters Park?

- Windamere Dam levels at the completion of the first phase of the transfer at end of February 2019 are likely to be around 25% or higher. Recreational activities at the Cudgegong Waters Park continued even when the dam levels dropped to 18.5% in late February 2010 during the millennium drought.

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